

Marital Quality and Congruent Drinking*

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ABSTRACT. Objective: This research considered whether changes in marital quality over the early years of marriage were related to patterns of alcohol use among three groups of couples: congruent nondrinkers, congruent drinkers who usually drank with their spouses and congruent drinkers who usually drank apart from their spouses. **Method:** Newlywed couples ($N = 418$) were assessed for marital satisfaction and drinking behaviors and then were reassessed at their first and second anniversaries. Cross-sectional analyses compared couples at each assessment and multilevel modeling assessed changes in marital satisfaction over time. **Results:** At each assessment, husbands and wives who usually drank with their partners reported greater levels of marital satisfaction. Over time, marital satisfaction declined for both husbands and

wives. When we assessed changes in marital quality based on the three groups, husbands in each group experienced similar declines in marital quality. Among wives, however, the rate of decline was not the same. Although wives in the nondrinking group and wives who usually drank with their husbands had similar initial marital satisfaction, the nondrinkers experienced a greater decline in marital satisfaction than the wives who drank with their husbands. The rate of change for the wives in the nondrinking group was quite similar to wives who more often drank apart from their spouses. **Conclusion:** These findings suggest that alcohol use may be a part of the couple's socializing and may increase interaction, thereby increasing marital satisfaction. (*J. Stud. Alcohol* 66: 488-496, 2005.)

AFTER REACHING ITS HIGHEST LEVEL in history during the 1980s, the divorce rate in the United States has been decreasing gradually over the last decade, yet the rate is still more than twice the divorce rate of the 1960s (National Marriage Project, 2004). The general level of marital quality is lower in recent generations compared with past generations (Rogers and Amato, 1997). Despite research on marital satisfaction over the past decades, many questions remain concerning changes in marital satisfaction over time. In a recent review on the subject, Bradbury et al. (2000) state that "research on how marriages develop and deteriorate is deficient in several key respects, and data are badly needed that will illuminate the factors that account for changes in satisfaction over key periods of marital development" (p. 975).

One theory on marital satisfaction, complementarity, suggests that increased satisfaction exists among couples with opposite needs and personalities (Brehm and Kassir, 1993). However, research support for this theory has been limited. Rather, similarity between couples appears to be more strongly related to not only mate selection but also to marital success; this research has been reviewed by O'Leary and Smith (1991). In a study of over 1,000 couples, the

relationships between marital satisfaction and similarity across a variety of domains (e.g., demographics, health, decision making) were assessed by Weisfeld et al. (1992). Couples that reported greater similarity were more likely to report greater marital satisfaction. Logan and colleagues (1993) examined marital adjustment and the similarity of lifestyle themes and social interests in a sample of couples with a 164-item self-report measure and found that fewer differences between partners were associated with greater marital adjustment.

Common patterns of substance use among couples have also been associated with marital quality. In a community sample of married couples, high lifetime concordance was found between partners for alcohol dependence and heavy drinking (McLeod, 1993). Additionally, McLeod found that couples who were concordant on lifetime alcohol dependence reported more positive marriages (less conflict, increased satisfaction) compared with discordant couples. Leadley et al. (2000) found that discrepant drinking patterns were associated with marital satisfaction and with marital violence, after controlling for heavy drinking. Similarly, Mudar et al. (2001) assessed tobacco use, drug use and alcohol use (any use, regular use, heavy use and frequency of intoxication) and marital functioning in husbands and wives at the time of their marriage. Among heavy drinkers, drug users, and those who were frequently intoxicated, the couples who were concordant for their substance use reported significantly higher levels of marital quality compared with the couples who were discordant for substance use. These findings indicating that concordance of substance use is associated with higher marital satisfaction and lower discord are consistent with compatibility theories of marriage

Received: October 21, 2004. Revision: February 9, 2005.

*The research for this article was supported by grant R37-AA09922 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to Kenneth E. Leonard.

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which suggest that partners with similar characteristics will have greater marital functioning (Levinger and Rands, 1985). Other work, however, has not found that concordance of alcohol use was associated with greater marital happiness (Graham and Braun, 1999), and some work has found that concordance of heavy drinking among marital couples was related to poorer marital quality (McLeod, 1993).

Although some research has suggested that similarity between couples has been associated with greater marital satisfaction (e.g., Deal et al., 1992; Houts et al., 1996), it is not clear under what circumstances this is true. Crawford et al. (2002) suggest that similarity between couples results in a greater likelihood that couples will engage in activities together and that it is this increased time together in shared activities which leads to a greater level of marital satisfaction. Further, they suggest that couples with dissimilar, or incompatible interests, will have greater difficulty finding joint activities to engage in, resulting in less satisfaction. Others have also suggested that couples who spend time together in leisure activities have greater levels of marital satisfaction (Baldwin et al., 1999). Holman and Jacquart (1988) assessed individuals with respect to their participation in 76 different activities over the past year. For both husbands and wives, participation in individually oriented leisure was inversely related to marital satisfaction, while participation in joint leisure activities was positively associated with satisfaction. Thus, shared activities appear to play a significant role in promoting marital quality while individual activities may reduce marital quality.

Shared activities between husbands and wives can take on many forms. Shared social activity may involve drinking or substance use. Roberts and Leonard (1998) examined patterns of alcohol consumption between husbands and wives and marital functioning. Using cluster analysis, couples were categorized by not only the quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption, but also by the percentage of drinking at home and the percentage of drinking in the presence of their spouses. Couples whose drinking patterns consisted of greater frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption compared with the rest of the sample, but who reported drinking a greater percentage of the time with their spouse, reported high levels of marital intimacy and marital functioning. However, this study was of cross-sectional data; therefore, it was not possible to consider changes over time. Based on this finding, and other findings that couples who report concordance for drinking patterns report higher levels of marital satisfaction compared with discordant couples, it is important to determine whether marital happiness is related to involvement in this shared activity. The purpose of the current report is to determine whether couples who more frequently drank together reported higher levels of marital satisfaction compared with couples who more often drank apart from their spouses. The construct of drinking together cannot easily be applied to couples in which

either the husband or the wife does not drink or drinks very rarely. Moreover, given that couples who manifest very different drinking patterns have lower levels of marital satisfaction (Mudar et al., 2001) and are also unlikely to drink together, we examined this issue only among couples with comparable levels of drinking between the husband and wife. While this focus on couples with congruent drinking patterns excludes a number of couples from the analysis, it provides a better test of the relationship between drinking together and marital satisfaction. We assessed changes in marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives over the first 2 years of marriage for three groups of married couples: congruent drinkers who more often reported drinking with their spouses, congruent drinkers who more often reported drinking apart from their spouses, and congruent, nondrinking couples.

Method

Participants

Participants were involved in the Adult Development Study, a longitudinal study of the early years of marriage. All participants were recruited at the time of marriage and were at least 18 years old, spoke English, and were literate. Couples were ineligible for the study if either member had been previously married. This report is based on 418 couples present at the first assessment who reported similar drinking patterns (described below). The majority of the men and women in the sample were European American (husbands: 62%; wives: 63%). About one-third of the sample was African American (husbands: 31%; wives: 28%). There were very small percentages of Hispanic, Asian or Native American participants. A large proportion of husbands and wives had at least some college education (husbands: 64%; wives: 71%) and most were employed at least part-time (husbands: 89%, wives: 75%). At the time of marriage, 34% of the husbands and 38% of the wives were parents. About 68% of the couples were living together prior to marriage, with an average (SD) of 21 (34.9) months.

Procedures

After applying for a marriage license, couples were recruited for a 5-10 minute paid (\$10) interview. The interview covered demographic factors (e.g., race, education, age), family and relationship factors (e.g., number of children, length of engagement), and substance use questions (e.g., tobacco use, average alcohol consumption, times intoxicated in the past year). For interested individuals who did not have time to complete this interview, a telephone interview was conducted later that day or the next day ($n = 62$). Less than 8% of the individuals approached declined to participate. We interviewed 970 eligible couples.

Complete details of the recruitment process can be found elsewhere (Leonard and Mudar, 2000, 2003). Briefly, couples who agreed to participate were given identical questionnaires to complete at home and asked to return in separate postage-paid envelopes (Wave 1 Assessment). Participants were asked not to discuss their responses with their partners. Spouses received \$40 for their participation. Only 7% of eligible couples refused to participate. Those who agreed to participate had lower incomes ($p < .01$) and the women were more likely to have children ($p < .01$) compared with those who did not participate. No other differences were identified. Of the 887 eligible couples who agreed to participate (13 of the original 900 did not marry), data were collected from both spouses for 634 couples (71.4%). Couples who returned the questionnaires were more likely to be living together compared with couples who did not return the questionnaires (70% vs 62%, $p < .05$) and more likely to be European American. No other sociodemographic differences existed between the couples who responded compared with those who did not.

At the couples' first and second anniversaries (Waves 2 and 3), they were mailed questionnaires similar to those they received at the first assessments, asked to complete the forms and return them in the postage-paid envelopes. Couple participation was high across the three assessments (74.5%). For the second and third assessments, data were collected from one or both members of 93% of couples ($n = 590$). Wives who did not participate in the second and third assessments were slightly younger ($p < .05$) and somewhat less educated than other wives ($p < .05$). Husbands who did not participate were less likely to be European American compared with the other husbands. The 418 couples included in the present analyses reported being congruent nondrinkers or congruent drinkers (described below) at the first assessment. The remainder of the time 1 sample of 634 couples (216 couples) reported discrepant drinking patterns and are not included in the present analyses.

Measures

Alcohol use. Past year alcohol use was assessed at each wave with beverage-specific questions using standard quantity/frequency questions (Cahalan et al., 1969). Congruent nondrinking couples were defined as couples in which neither the husband nor the wife reported drinking more than four drinks in the past year. Frequency of intoxication was assessed on a 9-point scale that ranged from "didn't get drunk last year" to "every day." To identify couples with similar patterns of frequency of intoxication in the past year, a congruent intoxication group was created. Husbands and wives who reported the same frequency of intoxication (\pm one category on the 9-point scale) in the past year were considered to be in the congruent group. We focused on the congruency in the frequency of intoxication

because other work with this data set has found that discrepancies in frequency of intoxication were related to marital satisfaction, but discrepancies in regular drinking or any drinking were not related to marital satisfaction (Mudar et al., 2001). Husbands and wives were asked how often they drank with their "partner present and also drinking" and how often they drank when their partner was not with them. The responses were recorded on an 8-point scale from "not at all in the past year" to "every day." This information was used to determine if the couple more often drank together or more often drank apart, thus defining two subgroups of congruent drinking couples: one group that reported a greater frequency of drinking with their partner compared with drinking without their partner present ("drink together") and the second group that reported drinking more often without their partner than with their partner present ("drink apart").

Relationship quality. At each wave, marital quality was assessed with the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke and Wallace, 1959). This instrument measures overall relationship quality. Higher scores indicated greater relationship quality (range: 2-158). The MAT had a high reliability across all waves of the study (average coefficient α across the three waves for the men = .75; among women, α = .76).

Demographic factors. At the initial in-person interview, each spouse reported their age, race/ethnicity, highest level of education obtained, employment status, number of children and the number of months of cohabitation.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to characterize the couples. To assess the longitudinal nature of marital satisfaction over time, we used multilevel modeling. Multilevel modeling is used to study nested data, such as students within schools, but it can also be applied to longitudinal studies (Hox, 2002). In this report, the repeated assessment of the couples is considered nested within the couple. The application of multilevel modeling in longitudinal studies has many advantages over traditional analyses. A complete discussion of these advantages is available elsewhere (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002); but, briefly, the use of multilevel modeling in longitudinal studies is particularly beneficial in terms of dealing with missing data. With many other methods, participants who did not provide data for each assessment would be considered missing, however; multilevel modeling allows participants with only information from one assessment to be included in the analyses. As with other analyses, the assumption that the data is missing at random must still be met (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). Additionally, because husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction is highly correlated (average correlation $r = .60$), multivariate multilevel analyses will allow us to account for this interdependence in the same model (Raudenbush et al., 1995).

We used a two-level model in the longitudinal analysis. The Level 1 model represented the repeated measures component of the marital satisfaction for the husbands and wives (the within couple variation) and the Level 2 model represented variation among the couples. The multilevel analysis was conducted with HLM 5 (Raudenbush et al., 2001) using a two-step procedure described by Raudenbush and Bryk (2002). First, an unconditional model was used to describe overall changes in marital satisfaction over time. Multivariate hypothesis testing was used to determine if the average curves for marital satisfaction were different for husbands and wives. Using multivariate hypotheses testing is more appropriate than initially using univariate tests to determine if average curves differ because the Type I error rate can be controlled (Raudenbush et al., 1995). Upon a significant multivariate finding, it is then appropriate to use univariate tests to identify where these differences are occurring. The second model, the conditional model, tested differences in marital satisfaction based on the groups over time. Using notation consistent with Raudenbush and Bryk (2002), the Level 1 and Level 2 models for the unconditional and conditional models are presented in Figure 1.

To further differentiate the groups, we assessed cross-sectional differences at each time point. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) compared marital satisfaction for husbands and wives in the three groups: the congruent non-drinkers, the couples who drink together and the couples who drink apart. This cross-sectional work extended the information presented in the multilevel models in two ways: First, we were able to consider each assessment separately; and second, we were able to conduct all pairwise group comparisons at each time point within each model.

Results

Two multilevel analyses were used to consider changes in couples' marital satisfaction over time. The first, the unconditional model, considered the overall changes for the full sample. The second, the conditional model, considered changes among the groups.

Unconditional model

An unconditional model was used to consider changes in marital satisfaction for husbands and wives over time (i.e., the slope) from the Wave 1 marital satisfaction (i.e., the intercept). At Wave 1, husbands' marital satisfaction score (SE) for the overall sample was 119.31 (0.96) while the wives' marital satisfaction score was slightly higher (120.76 [0.95]; Table 1). Over time, the marital satisfaction of husbands and wives declined. Husbands' marital satisfaction decreased almost 7 points per assessment while that of the wives' decreased almost 8 points per assessment. Although the initial rates of marital satisfaction and changes in satisfaction over time were quite similar between husbands and wives, we used multivariate hypothesis tests to determine if the average curves for marital satisfaction were statistically different for husband and wives. Based on a significant finding in the multivariate test ($\chi^2 = 20,494.78$, 4 df, $p < .001$), univariate hypothesis tests were conducted to determine if the initial values of marital satisfaction were different for husbands compared with wives and if the changes in marital satisfaction differed for husbands compared with wives. Based on the univariate tests, initial marital satisfaction was greater among the wives than among

Unconditional Model:

$$\text{Level 1: } Y = \pi_1 (\text{husband}) + \pi_2 (\text{wife}) + \pi_3 (\text{husband_time}) + \pi_4 (\text{wife_time}) + e$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \pi_1 = \beta_{10} + u_1$$

$$\pi_2 = \beta_{20} + u_2$$

$$\pi_3 = \beta_{30} + u_3$$

$$\pi_4 = \beta_{40} + u_4$$

Conditional Model:

$$\text{Level 1: } Y = \pi_1 (\text{husband}) + \pi_2 (\text{wife}) + \pi_3 (\text{husband_time}) + \pi_4 (\text{wife_time}) + e$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \pi_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11} (\text{Dummy1}) + \beta_{12} (\text{Dummy2}) + u_1$$

$$\pi_2 = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21} (\text{Dummy1}) + \beta_{22} (\text{Dummy2}) + u_2$$

$$\pi_3 = \beta_{30} + \beta_{31} (\text{Dummy1}) + \beta_{32} (\text{Dummy2}) + u_3$$

$$\pi_4 = \beta_{40} + \beta_{41} (\text{Dummy1}) + \beta_{42} (\text{Dummy2}) + u_4$$

FIGURE 1. Level 1 and 2 equations for the unconditional and conditional models. Y is the outcome variable, score on the Marital Adjustment Test. For level 1, the variables *husband* and *wife* are the intercept terms for husbands and wives, respectively. The variables *husband_time* and *wife_time* are the husband and wife slope terms, respectively. They are coded 0, 1 and 2 to represent the assessment at the time of marriage and the first and second anniversaries, respectively. The variable *e* represents the random effects term. For level 2, the β 's are the coefficients, and the *u*'s are the random effects. In the conditional models, the two dummy variables represent the three groups with the nondrinker group coded as the reference group.

TABLE 1. Unconditional model

Fixed effect	Coefficient (SE)	T ratio	p
Husband intercept	119.31 (0.96)	124.53	<.001
Wife intercept	120.76 (0.95)	126.20	<.001
Husband slope	-6.76 (0.75)	-8.97	<.001
Wife slope	-7.71 (0.74)	-10.49	<.001

Note: This table presents the unconditional multilevel model for the overall husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction (Marital Adjustment Test [MAT] scores) at the first assessment (i.e., the intercept) and the per year changes (i.e., the slope) in marital satisfaction.

the husbands ($\chi^2 = 20,271.62$, 2 df, $p < .001$). Additionally, wives experienced greater declines in marital satisfaction compared with husbands ($\chi^2 = 134.83$, 2 df, $p < .001$). It is important to note, however, that these statistically significant differences were quite small when comparing overall changes in husbands and wives marital satisfaction.

Conditional model

In the conditional model, changes in husbands' marital satisfaction over time were compared across groups with the nondrinking couples representing the referent group. Additionally, wives' marital satisfaction was compared across the groups. The Level 1 model (Figure 1) represents the within-couple change ($N = 1,254$) and the Level 2 model represents the between-couples change ($N = 418$). At Wave 1, husbands in the drink-apart group had significantly lower marital satisfaction compared with husbands in the nondrinking group (MAT score = 119.70 vs 110.83, a difference of 8.87 points, $p < .01$). (Table 2 presents the conditional multilevel analysis and Table 3 presents the actual

differences in scores.) Similarly, wives in the drink-apart group had significantly lower marital satisfaction compared with wives in the nondrinking group (120.47 vs 110.17, a difference of 10.30, $p < .01$). For both husbands and wives, the drink-together group's marital satisfaction score did not differ from the nondrinkers. Based on the unconditional models, marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives significantly decreased over time. The conditional models tested whether the decline in marital satisfaction was similar across the three groups of couples. Among husbands, there were no significant differences in the rates of decline for the three groups. The average decrease in marital satisfaction was quite similar for wives in the nondrinking group and wives in the drink-apart group. Women in the drink-together group showed a significantly slower rate of decline compared with the nondrinkers (5.42 vs 10.51, a difference of 5.09, $p < .01$). Figure 2 presents the changes in husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction by the three groups.

In the cross-sectional assessment of marital satisfaction, separate one-way ANOVAs were conducted for husbands and wives to identify differences across the three groups. At Wave 1, husbands in the drink-together group had significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction compared with husbands in the drink-apart group (MAT scores = 121.49 vs 111.83, respectively, $p < .05$; Table 4). Husbands in the nondrinking group also had significantly greater marital satisfaction compared with those in the drink-apart group (120.33 vs 111.83, $p < .05$). Although the same pattern of means was observed for Waves 2 and 3, there were no significant group differences at these assessments. In contrast, wives in the drink-together group had significantly greater marital satisfaction than wives in the drink-apart

TABLE 2. Conditional model

Fixed effect	Coefficient (SE)	T ratio
Husband intercept		
Nondrinkers (reference group)	119.70 (1.70)	70.61
Congruent, together	0.75 (2.10)	0.36
Congruent, apart†	-8.87 (3.39)	-2.62
Wife intercept		
Nondrinkers (reference group)	120.47 (1.64)	73.41
Congruent, together	2.24 (2.04)	1.10
Congruent, apart†	-10.30 (3.81)	-2.70
Husband slope		
Nondrinkers (reference group)	-8.37 (1.55)	-5.41
Congruent, together	2.40 (1.77)	1.35
Congruent, apart	2.90 (2.94)	0.99
Wife slope		
Nondrinkers (reference group)	-10.51 (1.37)	-7.64
Congruent, together†	5.09 (1.61)	3.17
Congruent, apart	-0.85 (3.38)	-0.25

Notes: This table presents the conditional multilevel model for husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction (Marital Adjustment Test [MAT] scores) at the first assessment (i.e., the intercept) and the per year changes (i.e., the slope) in marital satisfaction for each of the three groups using the nondrinker group as the reference group (the coefficients for the drinking groups are relative to the reference group).

† $p < .01$.

TABLE 3. Marital satisfaction scores for husbands and wives

Husbands' baseline MAT score	
Nondrinkers (reference group)	119.70
Congruent, together	120.45
Congruent, apart	110.83†
Wives' baseline MAT score	
Nondrinkers (reference group)	120.47
Congruent, together	122.71
Congruent, apart	110.17†
Husbands' changes in MAT score	
Nondrinkers (reference group)	-8.37
Congruent, together	-5.97
Congruent, apart	-5.47
Wives' changes in MAT score	
Nondrinkers (reference group)	-10.51
Congruent, together	-5.42†
Congruent, apart	-11.36

Notes: This table presents the husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction (Marital Adjustment Test [MAT] scores) at the first assessment and the per year changes in marital satisfaction. The differences in the baseline scores are derived from the coefficients of the intercepts presented in Table 2. The differences in the changes in MAT scores are derived from the coefficients of the slopes presented in Table 2. Significant differences ($p < .01$) between couples in the congruent drinking groups and the reference groups are indicated (†). The significant differences are based on the conditional models presented in Table 2.

group at all waves. At Wave 1, wives in the drink-together group were not different compared with the nondrinkers. However, at Waves 2 and 3, wives in the drink-together group had greater marital satisfaction compared with wives in the nondrinking group (all p 's $< .05$).

Discussion

The relationship between alcohol use and marital satisfaction is a complex one that may change at various stages of a couple's marital union. The goal of this work was to characterize marital satisfaction for husbands and wives both cross-sectionally and over time during the transition into marriage. We were interested in determining whether the manner in which couples used alcohol (i.e., congruent nondrinkers compared with drinkers who drank more often together or more often apart) was important when considering changes in marital satisfaction in the early years of marriage. The results were generally supportive of the expectation that individuals who usually drank with their spouses reported greater marital satisfaction, although the evidence was more clear with respect to wives.

When marital satisfaction was considered over time, the overall effect was a significant decline in both husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction. Despite the fact that wives started with higher levels of marital satisfaction compared

with husbands, wives also experienced greater declines in satisfaction over time. Husbands' marital satisfaction scores decreased an average of almost 7 points per year while wives' scores decreased almost 8 points per year, thus representing a change in our assessment period of about 14 points for husbands and 16 points for wives. These decreases place the mean marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives in the sample close to 100, the cutoff point often used to indicate differences between distressed and non-distressed couples (Freeston and Plechaty, 1997; Locke and Wallace, 1959). Thus, the changes we observed in marital satisfaction in the early years of marriage were significant, placing some of these relationships at risk very early. The sharp decrease in marital satisfaction over the first years of marriage is not uncommon. Glenn (1998) considered marital satisfaction in five separate, longitudinal cohorts and found that over the first 10 years of marriage, fairly sharp declines were evident for marital satisfaction before it leveled off in later years.

Multilevel models were used to compare the rates of change for marital satisfaction for husbands and wives across the three groups. Among husbands, the nature of their drinking was not related to changes in marital quality. However, among wives, differences emerged across the three groups. The rate of decline in marital satisfaction for the drinkers who usually drank apart from their husbands was similar to

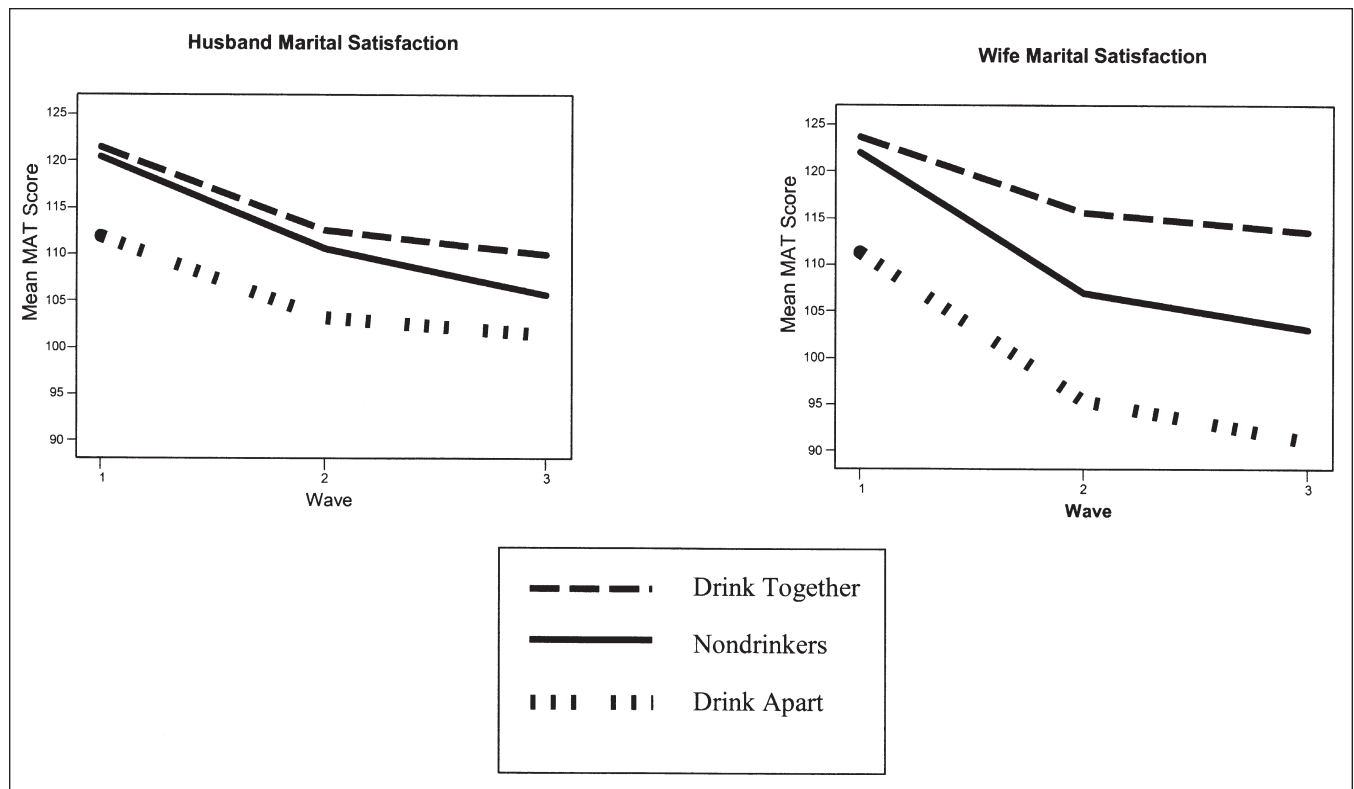


FIGURE 2. Graphs of husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction over time

TABLE 4. Relationship quality at each wave

Wave	Congruent nondrinkers Mean (SD)	Congruent drinkers		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
		Drink together Mean (SD)	Drink apart Mean (SD)		
Wave 1					
Husband MAT score	120.33 (20.23) ¹	121.49 (18.91) ²	111.83 (18.87) ^{1,2}	4.05	<.05
Wife MAT score	122.05 (19.16) ¹	123.67 (18.28) ²	111.19 (20.22) ^{1,2}	7.21	<.01
Wave 2					
Husband MAT score	110.65 (27.34)	112.55 (24.46)	103.14 (32.85)	1.85	.159
Wife MAT score	106.89 (31.99) ¹	115.55 (24.36) ^{1,2}	95.37 (35.18) ²	9.42	<.001
Wave 3					
Husband MAT score	105.68 (31.21)	110.00 (26.53)	101.41 (32.47)	1.61	.202
Wife MAT score	103.01 (33.58) ¹	113.43 (28.15) ^{1,2}	90.99 (40.41) ²	9.49	<.001

Notes: *N* = 418. MAT = Marital Adjustment Test. Similar superscripts in a given row indicate significant differences between groups (*p* < .05).

that of the nondrinkers. The rate of decline in marital satisfaction for the wives who usually drank with their husbands was significantly slower compared with wives in the nondrinking group. Thus, despite the fact that at Wave 1 the nondrinkers and the couples who more often drank together appeared to have similar marital satisfaction, their rates of decline were greatly different, and, based on the cross-sectional analysis, were, in fact, statistically different by the second anniversaries. The rates of decline for the nondrinkers and the couples who drank apart were very similar over time despite the fact that they were significantly quite different at the first assessment.

These results suggest that the impact of comparable drinking patterns on marital satisfaction is not solely based on similar behaviors and differs by gender. For women, the shared activity of alcohol consumption appears to be associated with smaller declines in marital satisfaction. One might surmise that similar drinking patterns might reflect normative acceptance of drinking behavior as well as other behaviors. However, the results clearly demonstrate that simply maintaining similar drinking patterns does not uniformly produce positive marital outcomes. Couples in which both members engaged in similar amounts of heavy drinking, but did not do so as part of a shared activity pattern, evidenced the lowest initial levels of marital satisfaction. In contrast, couples who were congruent in patterns of intoxication and usually drank with their spouses had the highest initial marital satisfaction.

Thus, this mutual drinking may reflect some form of socializing, or interaction, for the couple, and this in turn may enhance marital satisfaction. Roberts and Leonard (1998) labeled the patterning of alcohol consumption among married couples a "drinking partnership." This partnership was delineated not only by quantity and frequency of consumption but also by contextual features such as where the consumption occurred and if the partners consumed alcohol together. In a large community sample, they found that drinking partnerships that were comprised of husbands and wives who reported drinking together (even at greater quan-

ties and frequencies) had high levels of marital adjustment and marital intimacy. Roberts and Leonard suggested that these couples may have integrated drinking into their marital life. Similarly, Holmila (1988) found that couples who drink together reported greater marital satisfaction compared with couples who drank apart.

Although our findings suggest that couples who drink together experience higher levels of marital satisfaction compared with couples who drink apart and with nondrinking couples, the evidence in this report more strongly supports this finding for wives compared with husbands. The reason for this is not entirely clear. Holman and Jacquart (1988) considered whether husbands' and wives' involvement in joint leisure activities was related to marital satisfaction. Activities that involved spouses to be interactive with one another were more strongly related to marital satisfaction in both husbands and wives. However, the association was stronger for wives' marital satisfaction than it was for husbands' marital satisfaction. Furthermore, among couples married 6 years or less, only the association between joint leisure activities and wives' marital satisfaction remained significant. Similarly, Orthner (1975) also found that wives who are more often involved in leisure activities apart from their spouses were more likely to report decreased marital satisfaction compared with husbands. Cross and Madson (1997) hypothesized that women are more likely to develop an interdependent self-construal, whereas men are more likely to develop an independent self-construal. This would suggest that women might seek out a greater amount of joint activities and that these activities would be more closely linked to marital satisfaction for women compared with men.

During the transition into marriage, the social network of individuals tends to become more interdependent, with an overlap occurring between the spouses networks of friends and family (Kearns and Leonard, 2004). During the early years of marriage, changes in the social activities of the couple will also emerge. To adapt to this changing pattern of socializing, some individuals may change their substance use patterns in response to their partner's drinking.

Other research has found that spousal influence across a variety of substances is quite strong in the early years of marriage (e.g., Leonard and Homish, 2005; Leonard and Mudar, 2003). Those individuals whose drinking does not initially match or become more similar with their partners may be more likely to engage in other activities independent of their spouse. The resulting increase in independent activities may lead to decreased marital satisfaction. The fact that we observed the sharpest decline in marital satisfaction for individuals who more frequently drank apart from their spouses could suggest that, over time, these couples are progressively spending more time apart from each other. Thus, their level of interdependence and joint socialization may be significantly decreasing with time, thereby impacting the relationship.

Several limitations need to be considered when interpreting the results of this report. Although we found that couples who more frequently drank together had greater initial marital satisfaction and smaller declines in marital satisfaction over time, this somewhat adaptive finding needs to be considered within the sampling frame. This report focused on couples with similar alcohol use patterns; that is, couples who were either congruent nondrinkers or were congruent drinkers but drank in different contexts. Other findings from this sample show that couples who are discordant on their alcohol use show the greatest level of marital discord (Mudar et al., 2001). This report focused on newly married couples and is most relevant to the early years of marriage when spouses are initially adapting to each other. These findings may not be generalizable to later stages in marriage. We also did not consider other influences that would likely impact changes in marital satisfaction over time. For example, husbands' and wives' expectations about the marriage (McNulty and Karney, 2004), conflict resolution styles (Kurdek, 1995), transition to the first child (Hackel and Ruble, 1992) and negativity (Huston and Vangelisti, 1991) are just a few of the factors found to be associated with changes in marital satisfaction.

Although the findings are quite clear that couples who drink apart have lower marital satisfaction and decrease substantially over the first 2 years of marriage, it is important to note that this type of drinking partnership is not highly prevalent. Only approximately 6% (38 couples) of the full, original sample were classified as congruent drinkers who usually drank apart at the time of marriage. Couples with discordant drinking patterns have lower levels of marital satisfaction (Mudar et al., 2001) and are unlikely to drink together; therefore, to understand the relation between drinking together and marital satisfaction, we focused on couples with similar drinking patterns. Additionally, we did not consider the quantities or frequencies of alcohol consumed. Part of our criteria for defining the groups, however, was a similarity between husbands and wives on the frequency of intoxication in the past year.

We used a large community sample of married couples to examine concordance of drinking and marital satisfaction over the first years of marriage. Among concordant nondrinkers, concordant drinkers who drank more often together and those who drank more often apart, important differences were identified in not only initial marital satisfaction but also in changes in marital satisfaction. Future research will need to consider the mechanisms involved in the relation between marital satisfaction and substance use. Additionally, it will be important to determine if this pattern continues in the later years of marriage.

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